

## *From the Rector's Study ~*

The miracle of God incarnate continues. The birth of Jesus Christ was the first and singular miracle of God come among us in person. And miracles continued to mark God's presence. Jesus turned water into wine, healed the son of a political official, and restored a disabled man's ability to walk. The miracle of God's presence in the flesh was made manifest in extraordinary powers through the person of Jesus. And as wonderful as these were, the miracles that Jesus performed everywhere he went are the miracles that mattered most. Wherever he was, Jesus brought to the people around him God's own patient ear to listen, God's own gentle voice to speak peace, God's own hands to hold, God's own arms to embrace; God's own smile, tears, laughter, and Love. These are the miracles that continue to matter most today. Though the person of Jesus is not with us incarnate in our own day, the small and quiet care that you and I offer to people around us, the care and compassion that people offer to us, are the miracles that continue to incarnate God's presence come near. In the world today, we are the incarnation of God's Love for all; at Christmas and beyond it, we are this glorious miracle.

The miracle that was the birth of Jesus was the entrance of God into human existence in a way more genuinely and fully than anyone imagined possible. If some found the claims about the infant too incredible to accept, others found them too important to disregard. Shepherds rejoiced openly, likely receiving ridicule from many with whom they shared their experience. Wise ones from far away, philosopher theologians, quietly sought the place of this event of cosmic proportion, then returned home secretly.

The imagination of both groups in their respective contexts was ignited and illumined by Jesus' birth. It is safe and faithful to assume that each group was forever changed, and that each person in each group spent much of the rest of his or her life looking back and reflecting upon that change. What challenges entered into their lives on the night they decided to journey to Jesus? What changes came over them when they met Jesus? From that night onward, how were they different in heart and mind and soul? With the Christmas season behind us and the New Year just begun, it is timely for us also to reflect upon our own lives. How have we met Jesus over the year that is passing and so found our lives changed for the better? How have we helped to bring Jesus, to bring the presence of God, to others in the year that is ending, so that they might experience change worth reflection? Who has met God's Love in us? Where and in whom have we met God's Love in person? Then let us ask ourselves what determinations we shall make and what challenges we may face to seek the presence of God in the

context of the new year; and what we shall do and how we shall pray to bring the Love of God into the lives of people who journeys bring them to meet us there.

When we think about their own experience of the miracle of Christ's birth, gazing upon the face of a baby, hearing the child 'coo' and 'ahh,' it would have been difficult for Mary, Joseph, and the others who came to the nativity to be very cognizant, much less to be impressed, with the divinity of the child before them. The contrast between a helpless infant and notions of God as bombastic, wrathful, and punitive were blessedly stark and blessedly liberating.

This is precisely what makes Christmas important also as a celebration of Jesus' divinity. The God-ness of the Anointed One who enters into our humanity is not so much hidden as revealed by the subtlety of Jesus' birth. The very fact that Jesus' early years as a toddler, a child, and an adolescent remain a mystery (legends to the contrary aside) suggests that his life during these years was fairly unremarkable; i.e., he was a 'normal' young person; he was thoroughly human. Jesus' divinity is not regarded popularly as even a possibility until his humanity is revealed clearly among the people, again and again.

In adulthood, Jesus' exercise of divine ministry is guided always by his humanity. Over and over again, Jesus has compassion on those around him. His ministry is to the sick, the hungry, the friendless, the grieving. Rather than drive a presumptuous self-attainment of spiritual righteousness per adherence to religious ordinances and laws, Jesus reaches for the human reality of people's lives. He feeds the people literally, and in so doing he nurtures them spiritually. Jesus seems to understand that the existential divide between material and spiritual, between divinity and humanity, is illusory, if not outright deceptive. He understands that in the manner in which one feeds the hungry one is fully able to convey also the spiritual nourishment of God's Love for all.

Christmas is a nice and lovely reminder that divinity is the state of being in which Christ Jesus always resided and resides. It reminds us that divinity is the quiet subtle state of being in which each of us is born and called to share. Remembering this may help to bring the story of Jesus' birth and our own in touch with one another in ways that extend beyond a day or a season. It may help us be more aware of the presence of God with us always, in our day-to-day hurry, and of those otherwise missable little moments that God's Love for us all is making sacred in the gospel of our lives.

God's Peace. *Jim +*